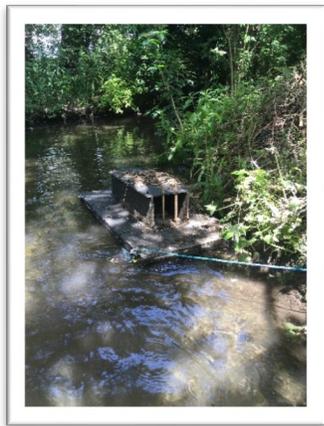


## Letcombe Brook Project

Letcombe Brook is a chalk stream rising from the chalk downs at the northern edge of the North Wessex Downs AONB. It flows from Letcombe Bassett in a roughly northern direction to north of East Hanney where it joins the Childrey Brook before flowing into the Ock and on into the Thames. It supports many priority species such as kingfisher, water vole, brown trout, bullhead and otter.

Letcombe Brook Project (LBP) is a small charity funded by Parish, Town and District Council. Funding pays for the services of a self-employed Project Officer (PO) part-time to deliver the aims of the LBP.

**Invasive Species Project.** Himalayan Balsam is an invasive plant affecting the Letcombe Brook. Working jointly with local Flood Groups, the PO and volunteers are identifying stands of Balsam and tackling it by hand-pulling it before it sets seed. An awareness campaign has also been launched to encourage riparian owners to do the same or ask for assistance from LBP.



**American Mink** are also being targeted as once healthy water vole populations along much of the brook seem to have declined between 2014 and 2017. It is suspected that mink may be the reason for this decline as their presence was noted at Letcombe Regis where water vole colonies had disappeared. 3 mink were trapped and killed here in 2017.

Mink rafts are being installed along the brook to monitor for mink activity and live-trap them for humane dispatch if they are present. 3 rafts are in place along the brook but the PO is keen to find other landowners prepared to house a raft, particularly at the lower reaches. No mink have been identified so far in 2019 but it's important we continue to monitor for any mink moving in.

## Habitat Management

The PO is working with a team of volunteers to improve habitat along the brook which has been neglected in many areas. Work focuses on reducing shading by coppicing and pollarding bankside trees and clearing bramble from sections of river bank. LBP are also working with riparian owners to get similar work completed on their land. It's encouraging to see that in areas where this work has been started, marginal and in-stream vegetation have started to recover providing valuable habitat for many chalk stream species.



### **Improving Connectivity and Natural Flow**

The PO is mapping and collecting information on blockages to fish passage along the brook. There are many including a huge dam, several mill sluices and various small “ornamental waterfalls” along the 12km of the brook. As well as preventing passage of fish and other wildlife, these impediments to natural flow affect sediment erosion, transport and deposition and can add to flood risk. Blockages will be prioritised and efforts made to work with landowners to seek removal, modification or bypass. This is a long-term project but should help Letcombe Brook attain good status under the Water Framework Directive as it presently fails on fish populations.



Mark Bradfield, Letcombe Brook Project, [letcombebrook@hotmail.com](mailto:letcombebrook@hotmail.com)